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## THE METHODS EMPLOYED IN MAINE IN CHECKING THE RETURNS OF BIRTHS, MARRIAGES, AND DEATHS.

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I preface what I have to say with a statement of some of the provisions of the Maine registration law.

The Secretary of the State Board of Health is *ex-officio* State Registrar of Vital Statistics, and the law provides that he shall enforce its provisions as far as comes within his power, and further provides that, when any penalty or forfeiture has been incurred, he shall put the case into the hands of the proper prosecuting attorney. Births must be reported to the town or city clerk by the physician or midwife within six days of the events. Intentions of marriage must be recorded. No clergyman or justice may solemnize a marriage until he has received a marriage certificate from the hands of the parties to the proposed marriage, and a report of the marriage must be made to the town clerk within six days. When deaths occur, the attending physician must furnish a certificate of the cause of death, but the onus of completing the certificate and obtaining a burial permit is on the undertaker or other person who moves the body or superintends the burial. The obligation is also upon householders to report births and deaths which occur in their houses or families. Until this year annual reports were made by the local clerks to the State Registrar, but beginning with this year a provision for monthly returns of births, marriages, and deaths went into effect.

In Maine the methods in use for checking or controlling and making more nearly complete the returns of births, marriages, and deaths, are the following:—

*Births.*—The town clerk, when he learns of any birth which has not been reported to him, must collect and record the required facts so far as he is able to do so. For this he receives a special fee. The assessors, when taking the annual inventory in the month of April each year, collect and return to the town clerk the names of children born in the preceding year. The law provides that, when the town clerk makes his returns of births, marriages, and deaths to the State Registrar, he shall report to him the names, residences, and official stations of all persons who have neglected to make returns to him.

We have a system of newspaper clippings applying to marriages and deaths as well as to births. The office of the State Registrar subscribes to several newspapers which are published in different parts of the State, and which give quite full lists of births, marriages, and deaths. All birth, marriage, and death notices found are cut out. These clippings are pasted

upon pieces of manila paper  $2 \times 4\frac{3}{4}$  inches in size, sorted in three packages, and stamped with a rubber stamp "birth," "marriage," and "death," respectively. The items are arranged alphabetically under the name of the father of the child for births, of the bridegroom for marriages, and of the person deceased for deaths. A search for duplicates results in throwing out thousands. Those remaining are compared with the card returns of births, marriages, and deaths. This results in eliminating all but about a total of five hundred a year. These five hundred or there-about represent the births, marriages, and deaths recorded in the newspapers, but which have not been returned to the State office. These clippings are sent to the respective town clerks, accompanied by a circular letter asking them to learn whether the events described actually occurred, and, if they did, to make and return the records together with a statement of who was responsible for the failure to make the reports to him.

In the last three years, clippings from four or five newspapers, all weekly but one, have brought in as a yearly average about 140 records of births, 20 records of marriages, and 75 records of deaths which had not been received before, or a total of about 235 additional records each year.

*Marriages.*—In checking the returns of marriages, we have nothing to depend upon but the co-operation of the town clerks, to which reference has already been made, and the system of newspaper clippings just outlined.

*Deaths.*—Besides getting on the track of persons who have failed to comply with the requirements of the law, through newspaper clippings and the co-operation of town clerks we are now preparing to make use of the duplicate part of the transit permits returned to the office by the transportation companies, and also of the applications to the State Board of Health for disinterment permits.

This system of newspaper clippings entails much work, and the number of additional returns obtained is comparatively small. It is perhaps questionable whether the results pay for the trouble and expense. I have concluded that they do pay. The wide-spread moral effect of this system on those whom the law requires to perform certain duties is, I think, its greatest value, for they are made to perceive that information of lapses of duty is often received by the executive officer of the registration department. All these cases of default alphabetically arranged are recorded upon blanks and form what we call the "sombre list": it extends back over years. This list and the correspondence which it initiates show most of the cases of default to be unintentional, the result of occasional forgetfulness, accident, or misunderstandings. But it also reveals habits of gross and wilful negligence on the part of some physicians, undertakers, and persons, and constitutes a record which at any time may be made the basis of action on the part of the County Attorney.